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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/05/2016
TAGS: PGOV PREL KDEM PKAO EAID HA
SUBJECT: CEP DIRECTOR GENERAL RETURNS TO HAITI

REF: PORT-AU-PRINCE 365

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Douglas Griffiths. Reasons 1.4 b and d.

¶1. (C) Summary: After two weeks of uncertainty, Provisional Electoral Council (CEP) Director General (DG) Jacques Bernard returned to Haiti on March 5 to re-assume his position. A delegation of CEP members headed by CEP President Max Mathurin met him at the airport. In Bernard's absence, six members of the CEP signed a public declaration pledging their unwavering support for Bernard and appreciation for his role in the successful conclusion of the first round of the general election held February 7 (reftel). CEP councilors Pierre Richard Duchemin and Patrick Fequiere, harsh critics of Bernard, are expected to launch strenuous opposition in response to Bernard's re-assumption of his duties. The international community, led by the US and Canada, remain committed to assist Bernard and the CEP successfully manage the remainder of the electoral process to ensure a smooth transition of power to the president-elect. End Summary.

¶2. (C) A majority of the CEP welcomed CEP DG Bernard upon his return to Port-au-Prince on March 5. After the uncertainty of the previous two weeks of whether or not Bernard would return, the six CEP members (CEP-6) who had publicly voiced support for him were visibly relieved. The Charge, joined by the Canadian Ambassador, met with CEP members Francois Benoit and Josefa Gauthier March 4 to offer support with Bernard's reintegration into the Director General's position. Both councilors expressed appreciation for the offer and said it would be needed. Gauthier half-jokingly predicting "war on Monday." Benoit assured Charge that support for Bernard by the six CEP councilors is categorically firm.

3, (C) The main concern surrounding Bernard's return is the response to it by Pierre Richard Duchemin and Patrick Fequiere, both voluble critics of Bernard, and to a lesser extent their CEP ally, Gerson Richme. Duchemin and Bernard's relations were strained from the beginning and have continued to degenerate. When queried by Charge on Duchemin's unswerving opposition to Jacques Bernard as Director General, both Benoit and Gauthier credited Duchemin's unrestrained personal ambition and in Benoit's words, "lust for power." Duchemin is a smart and capable person. However, his judgment with regard to Bernard is clouded by a deep-seated personal animosity. Neither President Alexandre nor Archbishop Kebreu, head of the Catholic church's Episcopal Conference which appointed Duchemin, were willing to remove

him from his position on the CEP.

¶4. (C) In contrast to the competent though difficult Duchemin, Fequiere is a loose cannon and contrarian to his core. Fequiere's opposition to Bernard poses a problem not because it is rational or reasonable but due to his access to the media and the media's willingness to provide him with an outlet. He has shown himself willing to provoke a scandal based on little or no evidence. He is the representative from the "non-aligned" political parties, a loose group that lacks a clear leader who could possibly rein in Fequiere's grandstanding.

¶5. (C) Comment: With Bernard's return, CEP operations should get back on track to assure that the second round legislative races can take place as soon as logistically feasible, thereby permitting the inauguration of President-elect Preval before a seated National Assembly. There is an unspoken recognition by the CEP-6 that their reputations are on the line and it is through Jacques Bernard that they can salvage some measure of face from their total inability and incompetence to carry out the task that was set before them more than eighteen months ago. Bernard will need the continued support from the international community and the IGOH. At our request, the PM hosted Bernard for lunch the day of his return as a strong signal of support. We are also encouraging the PM and President to meet with the CEP as a group to reiterate the need to behave and move forward with the elections. Unfortunately neither leader has much appetite for conflict so we are doubtful if such a gathering will have the full, desired effect. End Comment.

GRIFFITHS